

The Pittsylvania Packet

Summer 2004

Number 53



Pittsylvania Historical Society

Chatham, Virginia

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President's Report

A hearty thanks to Fuller and Judy Motley and all those who helped with "The Meadows" bus tour in May. This was a most interesting tour of Coles Hill, home of Walter Coles V and his wife Alice.

The lunch, held at the Motleys' restored log cabin, was a delight and the bus tour past the homesteads of the Pannills, Mustains, and Womacks was well worth the trip. All who missed this outing missed great history, past and future.

The Summer meeting of the Society will be our Annual Picnic, which will be held this year in the Frances Hallam Hurt Park adjacent to the restored 1813 Clerks Office and Museum.

For those members who are new to the area or not familiar with Chatham the location of the park is behind the Town Office on Court Place in the center of the Town of Chatham. We look forward to seeing you at this meeting.

- Langhorne Jones, Jr., President

Note from the Editor

I've been receiving lots of suggestions for the *Packet* recently. Member Owen Johnson suggested more genealogical articles (wills, deeds, land records, etc.) and another reader suggested more illustrations. We've also repeatedly had requests for information about the poor houses in the area.

I try to incorporate the feedback that we get from our readers — and, in this issue, a will, an article about poor houses, and a historic photograph are included!

Please continue to make suggestions, and to submit articles and queries for our readers to enjoy.

Sarah E. Mitchell, Editor

**Summer Meeting:
July 19th, 2004**

The Summer Picnic will be held on Monday, July 19th, starting at 5:30 PM (the food will be served shortly after 6 PM) at the Frances Hurt Park behind Town Hall and the 1813 Clerk's Office.

There is no charge, but donations will be accepted. Please bring your own chairs and blankets.

Plans for musical guests and a speaker are being finalized; watch for more information in the *Star-Tribune*.

**Callands Festival:
October 2nd, 2004**

The 24th annual Callands Festival will be held on October 2nd, from 10 AM to 4 PM. Vendors will be selling wares, reenactors will be on the grounds, and good food will be available.

Deadline for Submissions

Please submit any announcements, articles, etc. for the next issue of *The Pittsylvania Packet* by September 15th, 2004. Queries and letters from our readers are always welcome!

Special Thanks to Our Patrons

The Pittsylvania Historical Society would like to acknowledge to our 2004 patrons:

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Pittsylvania and Henry County Poor House Farms

by Desmond Kendrick

On November 21, 1996, I had a chance to go and visit the site of the last poor house farm in Henry County, which was located in the Rangeley community. Like most people, I had never given much thought into the importance of this place. From early childhood, I had heard many older people talk about the "Poor House Farm," but I never had reason to explore the ordeals that these people had to go through. My own grandmother had an aunt and a grandmother who were in the poor house in Pittsylvania County.

Being interested in history for most of my life, I naturally should have assumed that I would in time come in contact with this subject. As a child, I played in and around old homesites and cemeteries. Being raised in a country store in Mountain Valley, a small area of Henry County one mile from the Pittsylvania County line, I was always around older people talking about their families and old home sites. This upbringing naturally caused a great spark of interest in the people and places of their discussion and natural curiosity made me want to know more about these people and places that they were talking about.

One thing that really caught my interest in the poor house of Rangeley was the fact that a number of children were buried in the cemetery there. Children's graves have always held a special place in my heart, possibly because I had a brother to die at two days old of pneumonia.

I assumed when most people think about a poor house, they automatically think about older

people living there. At least I did. The poor house always seemed more like a nursing home type of environment from the stories that I had always heard. Nothing could be so far from the truth. Basically, the poor house, or sometimes called the poor farm, was a place people went when they had nowhere else to go. Most people at that time had very little money or personal belongings or in some cases, nothing at all. A lot of the people in these poor houses did not have any family to take care of them.

The care of the helpless must always be a concern for a civilized society. In August of 1783, the Virginia Acts of the Assembly provided for Overseers of the Poor to assume responsibility for the well-being of the indigent, orphans, illegitimate children, the feeble and others in distress and need. These Overseers of the Poor were elected for periods of three years, but many of them did not serve their full terms and had to be replaced in special election. Some of the Overseers resigned of their own accord, while others were replaced because of inefficiency or misuse of the office. One of their principal responsibilities was the administration of the Poor House, which cared for the indigent elderly.

The poor house was basically self-sufficient. The people there grew their own crops and raised their own cows, pigs, etc. Most of the homes were "dogtrot"-type small two-family dwellings which were heated by fireplaces. Dogtrot houses were basically two log cabins, built side by side, with a breezeway or porch built between them. These were usually scattered about the farm. Also on the farm, there was usually a milk house, a grainery, blacksmith shop, overseer's house, barns, a stable, and sometimes even a jail. The kitchen and dining area was a larger building that could seat many of the occupants of the farm at once for meals. Gardens

were grown and fruit was dried on the tin roofs of the houses and other buildings. A large iron pot or wood stove was used for cooking. Another large pot was used for boiling clothes. A well or, more often, a nearby spring supplied water.

Surviving ledgers kept at the poor house site give sometimes crude, but vivid accounts of the lives of the people that lived there. Surprisingly, the records in these books are very accurate representations of the people here at the time, according to the overseer's view of them. In most cases, the book gives the place and the time period that the person was born. It also tells when the person was admitted to the poor house and when they died or were discharged from the farm. Also given is the reason the person was admitted to the farm. Sometimes the way the entries are written seems cruel, but the information was written as most likely it was given or as the overseer saw the person's condition to be.

The poor farm of Pittsylvania County was established as early as 1860. On March 6, 1860, the Overseers of the Poor for Pittsylvania County purchased two tracts of land bordering Hickey's Road on Bearskin Creek from John M. and Mary R. Younger for the purpose of establishing a poor house. The first tract, totaling 85 ½ acres, was purchased for \$5 an acre. The second tract, totaling 541 acres, was purchased for \$11 an acre.

The Rangeley poor house site was not established until June 1, 1882, when the Board of Supervisors of Henry County bought from John H. Schoolfield and his wife, Susan, as well as others, a 298-acre tract of land for the sum of \$2,000. The poor house operated here until September 1929, when the land was sold by the Board of Supervisors to Peter Spencer. Much of the property is still in the Spencer family today.

Up until 1929, practically every county had its own poor house or poor farm. At this time the poor houses of Henry, Pittsylvania, and other counties were consolidated to a single site near the present town limits of Chatham, in Pittsylvania County. The last entries in the Henry County ledger mentions people being moved to the “new house” as late as October 1929. The transition time for this move must have been a tremendous strain for the people in the homes as well as the workers who helped move them. The new home would have been approximately thirty miles away. Most of the people would have never been that far before in their entire lives. Today, the “poor farm” is known as Oak Grove Residential Care. Although not known today as a poor farm, the lodge still serves a similar purpose as earlier sites (though no children are placed there today).

Often, people tend to look down on, or give little thought to, the people and places of the past. We look at things and judge them without really knowing what we are judging. These people, rich or poor, were, and will continue to be, our heritage.

To quote a saying from Patrick Henry that I have heard many times in my life, “You don’t know where you are going until you know where you have come from.”

An Unusual Will

In 1876, the following will was recorded in the Pittsylvania County Courthouse, Will Book 3, p. 215. It is reprinted here with the original spelling and punctuation:

“I, Jesse [either I. or J.] Grubb of the County of Pittsylvania Va. do make and publish this as my last will and testament Viz. I did not hate Levina Bow when she was a girl. She is the daughter of Betsy Bow. Mary

Mahan the daughter of Naman Mahan's wife when a child pleased me. The second children of James Mahan being twins charmed me. I therefore give and bequeath my entire property at my death to be sold and equally divided betwixt the said parties above mentioned. Given under my hand this 19th day of April 1876, in the presents of the witnesses hereto annexed, who signe the same in my presents and in the presents of each other."

A little more information on the Grubb family can be found in Madelene Fitzgerald and Frances Hallam Hurt, *18th Century Landmarks of Pittsylvania County, Virginia*.

The Last Five Hangings in Pittsylvania County, Virginia

Edited by Henry Mitchell

Daniel Allen Hearn of Botsford, Connecticut, recently wrote to advise of his research on the last five persons who were publicly executed by hanging in Pittsylvania County:

Isaac Evans, Reuben King, and Sawney Younger (September 28, 1883);

Jed Pritchett (March 29, 1889); and

Edward Hankins (November 11, 1897).

All these executions occurred after the August 4, 1882 hanging of Walter Hamilton "Ham" Yeatts, who is sometimes mistakenly referred to as "the last man hanged in Pittsylvania County." (See Herman Melton, *Thirty-Nine Lashes - Well Laid On*, 2002, pp. 272-285, for a thorough account of the Ham Yeatts incident.) The reasons for this memorable but

erroneous designation as "last man hanged" may include the fact that the Yeatts case was a soap-opera drama involving high passions and some of the county's most prominent families; and also that in 1882 the Virginia General Assembly gave localities the option of passing their death-row inmates to a state facility for execution, rather than carrying out the sentences on local scaffolds. It is a logical assumption that all later executions occurred outside Pittsylvania, but researcher Hearn offers conclusive evidence for five subsequent hangings in Chatham.

For the Evans/King/Younger execution, Hearn provides as references articles from the *Richmond Dispatch* and *New York Herald* for Saturday, September 29, 1883. The articles state that the young men had been arrested for the murder of local farmer William F. Sheppard, who had been robbed and shot while on the way home after selling a load of potatoes in Danville. Several attempts to lynch the suspects had been foiled by Danville officials and military guards in Danville and Chatham. Evans and King confessed and implicated Younger (but later said they had done so in hopes of mercy from the Governor). The execution was carried out on a scaffold "in an enclosure 150 yards from the jail." Younger was buried under the scaffold; Evans and King had earlier sold their bodies to the Richmond Medical College.

The Pritchett hanging is described in detail in a March 30, 1889 article from the *Richmond Dispatch*. Jed Pritchett had been convicted of the violent assault of an 8-year-old girl. The account includes the following:

"Though shackled he resisted manfully and refused to stand on the trap. He fought and tried to bite the officers. His struggles were painful to behold. Finally he fell exhausted

across the trap. The trigger was sprung about 12:30 and Pritchett pushed through the hole. He died from strangulation in twenty minutes after the drop fell. Under a recent act of the Legislature his body was turned over to agents of the University of Virginia and shipped there for dissecting purposes in the medical department."

An article from the *Richmond Dispatch*, November 12, 1897, describes the death of Edward Hankins on November 11. Hankins had been convicted of killing Dr. John Roy Cabell in northern Pittsylvania on August 28. Hankins had been a tenant for the frail, elderly Dr. Cabell, who died in a quarrel resulting from Hankins' firing and a related dispute over pay for work done by Hankins. The *Dispatch* article includes the following details of events leading up to the hanging:

"Hankins slept well last night, and at 9 o'clock this morning ate moderately of the breakfast supplied from Sheriff W. I. Overbey's family table. During the morning Miss Jennie Nelson, principal, and several of the young ladies of the Episcopal Female College [now Chatham Hall], of Chatham, sang to the prisoner in his cell, and he was visited also by Rev. C. O. Pruden, rector of the Episcopal church, and by Rev. T. A. Hall, of the Baptist church, the latter spending hours with him, and administering final spiritual consolation at the scaffold. The gallows was erected in an improvised death chamber constructed about a small rear porch of the jail, the whole being about 8 by 14 feet square. In the centre of the floor the death trap, about 2 1/2 feet square, opened into a 10-foot deep pit. Two uprights of heavy timber, one at either side of the trap,

supported the crossbeam from which was suspended the noose. Into this small boxlike arrangement were crowded the witnesses, when at 2:20 o'clock P. M. Sheriff Overbey directed his deputies to bring the prisoner from his cell."

Notes:

Researcher Daniel Allen Hearn's correspondence address is P. O. Box 198, Botsford, CT 06404. Hearn also has collected information about the following executions by hanging in the City of Danville, Virginia, during this period:

Jim Lyles and Margaret Lashley, January 22, 1892, for the killing of George Lashley (*Richmond Dispatch*, January 23, 1892);

Sylvester Griffin, December 28, 1900, for the shooting of Georgia King (*Richmond Dispatch*, December 29, 1900);

Arthur Wilton, February 6, 1903, for the murder of Jake Lee (*Atlanta Constitution*, February 7, 1903);

William Jones, October 9, 1903, for the murder of Jake Lee (*Washington Post*, October 10, 1903).

Herman Melton advises that when he was writing his *Thirty-Nine Lashes — Well Laid On*, he noted on page 152 that Sam Lovelace (1846-1953) had told WPA interviewers of his having attended a triple hanging behind the Pittsylvania County Courthouse. Melton states that he was never able to find a record of that event, but that surely it is the 1883 Evans/King/Younger execution documented by Hearn.

Pittsylvania County's Communities in the 1880's: Part II

The following descriptions of Pittsylvania's towns and communities come from an 1881-1882 *Danville City Directory*. Herman Melton provided copies from the book to the society. The editor

plans to print more of the descriptions in later editions of the *Packet*.

Notes: the abbreviations used in the original document were copied. Evidently, P M stood for Postmaster. The abbreviation for general merchandise varied from genl mdse to gen mdse. The Virginia Midland Railroad was shortened to Va Mid Ry. Wm was the shortened form of William; Benj was the abbreviated form of Benjamin.

Hurt's Store

Has one hundred inhabitants, is on the Va. Mid. Ry. Twenty miles north of Chatham, the county seat; is located on Sycamore Creek in a fine agricultural section. Iron ore and marble are abundant. There are several saw and grist mills in operation near here. There are also three churches and two schools near. Mails daily.

S T Hurt, P M

Adams, W V, physician
Berry & Lillard, saw mill and lumber
Devericks, A J, tel operator
Fitzgerald & Williams, saw mill
Gosney, Jas H, genl mdse
Graves, J H & Co, saw mill
Haley, A T, physician
Haley, H B, genl mdse
Haden, J M, wheelwright
Hurt, H H & Bro, genl mdse
Hurt, J L, lawyer
Peyton, W G, carpenter
Rush, V Miss, millinery
Smith, Geo W, blacksmith
Snow, D R, justice of the peace
Snow & Roark, grist mill

[Editor's Note: According to the 1880 census, the H. H. Hurt (who evidently owned the general merchandise establishment at Hurt's Store) was born in Ireland in 1842. He seemingly was not closely, if at all, related to the Hurt family, long-time citizens in the Chatham area.]

Laurel Grove

A small settlement of perhaps one hundred inhabitants with one church, one public school and several saw and grist mills near. Mails triweekly.

A. Anderson, PM

Anderson, Alfred, gen mdse
Burton, James M. justice peace
Carmichael & Wilkinson, g m
Dodson, Paul H., wheelwright
Farmer N B & Son, saw mill
Flippin, J H, grist and saw mill
Fourqueam, Moses, blacksmith
Ragsdale & Davis, genl mdse
Schofield, Jacob & Son, saw and grist mill
White, T W, physician

Malmaison

Six miles north of Danville, which is the nearest shipping point. Population about forty. Mails daily.

W H Giles, P M

Farrell Wm E, carriages and wagons
Ferguson, J E, physician
Giles, W H & Son, gen mdse
Keeling, I C & Bro, genl mdse
Lanier & Ferrell, mill
Williams, Edward, physician

Motley's Depot

A way station on the Va. Midland Ry, thirty-four miles north of Danville, seventeen from Chatham, the county seat, and twenty-nine from Lynchburg; has two churches near, one school and one saw and grist mill. Mails daily.

J E Haley, P M

Austin, Geo P, justice of the peace
Haley, J E, genl mdse
Musgrove, S, shoemaker
Pemberton & Musgrove, blacksmiths
Roach, J E, saw and grist mill

Genealogy Query

I am wondering if someone might have information on the parents and families of William Ingram and his wife, Elizabeth Dodson.

As I understand, both were born in Virginia: William circa 1750 and Elizabeth circa 1757. Both died in Pittsylvania County: William, before June 19th, 1820 and Elizabeth before March 1819. Also, I am seeking information on the parents and family of Hanna (Johanna) Mayes. She was born circa 1770 in Virginia and was married to Garland Ingram February 15th, 1796 in Pittsylvania County. She died after 1860.

I have enjoyed The Pittsylvania Packet and also the book *The History of Pittsylvania County* by Maud Carter Clement.

Thanks for any help I might receive.

Mary Ingram Gisselberg
295 N. Webster Lane
Lilliwaup, WA 98555

Lady Liberty Raises Money for War Bonds



The above picture is from 1917, and is of Mrs. J. J. Patterson. Evidently she was selling War Bonds in Chatham, and decided to dress as the Statue of Liberty for the occasion! Close examination shows that she is wearing headgear with stars; the “horn” is actually a flaw in the photograph.

Information and photograph from the Glenn B. Updike Collection, Pittsylvania Historical Society..

Pittsylvania Historical Society Books

The Historical Society books are currently available for purchase from the following retailers. Suggested retail prices do not include shipping, handling, or tax.

Chatham Books
10 North Main Street
P. O. Box 71
Chatham, Virginia 24531
434-432-2488
chathambooks@gamewood.net

Mitchells Publications
P. O. Box 429
Chatham, Virginia 24531
434-432-0595
<http://www.MitchellsPublications.com>
answers@foodhistory.com

Shadetree Rare Books
P. O. Box 994
Chatham Antique Gallery
Chatham, Virginia 24531
434-432-1400
<http://www.ShadetreeRareBooks.com>
hhurt@adelphia.net

Maud Carter Clement, *History of Pittsylvania County* (Hardcover)
Suggested Retail Price: \$22.

Madelene Fitzgerald, *Pittsylvania Homes and History of the Past* (Hardcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$18.

Roger Dodson, *Footprints from the Old Survey Books* (Softcover)
Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Madelene Fitzgerald and Frances Hallam Hurt, *18th Century Landmarks of Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Softcover)
Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Gray's *Map of Chatham, Virginia 1878* (Frameable Map)
Suggested Retail Price: \$3.

Frances Hallam Hurt, *An Intimate History of the American Revolution in Pittsylvania County, Virginia* (Hardcover)
Suggested Retail Price: \$15.

Herman Melton, *Pittsylvania County's Historic Courthouse: The Story Behind Ex Parte Virginia and the Making of a National Landmark* (Softcover) Suggested Retail Price: \$11.

Herman Melton, *Thirty-Nine Lashes Well Laid On: Crime and Punishment in Southside Virginia 1750—1950* (Hardcover)
Suggested Retail Price: \$22.

Judge Langhorne Jones, *Tales from a Small Town* (Softcover)
Suggested Retail Price: \$5.